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References to the Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls: the Originals Rediscovered

A.C. Cawley, Jean Forrester and John Goodchild

There are four extant rolls recording the proceedings of the Wakefield Burgess Court in 1533, 1556, 1559 and 1579, two of which (1556, 1559) contain references to the Corpus Christi play. Recently the originals of these rolls have been rediscovered after many years in which they were thought lost and possibly destroyed. We can therefore now check the accuracy of the transcripts made by J.W. Walker and published by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in 1929¹ as well as investigate the source of the play items added by Walker to his transcript of the 1556 roll.²

History of the Wakefield Burgess Court rolls

We first hear of the survival of some of the Wakefield Burgess Court rolls in November 1901 when their then owner W.H. Battie-Wrightson,³ who himself transcribed the 1556 record,⁴ wrote to his lawyer friend Claude Leatham:

I find amongst my old deeds here 3 Burgess rolls of Wakefield dated 1534 1556 & 1578⁵ – and I am inclined to think that some of the early Battiés must have held some office at the Burgess Court If you know of any one who can read old documents & search for the name of Battie I will gladly pay a fee for his trouble.⁶

Leatham sent the letter to Walker, who began a correspondence with Battie-Wrightson. In his letter of December 26, 1901, Battie-Wrightson made the following reference to the Burgess Court rolls, which he had already sent to Walker:

They are evidently the originals, & I think wd. never have all 3

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

been left in the Custody of the Batties, unless one of them⁷ (or more probably father & son) had been an officer of the Court.⁸

It is clear from the above quotations that the rolls in question had been found by Battie-Wrightson among his family papers and had not been purchased by him.

In the same letter of December 26, 1901, Battie-Wrightson told Walker he could keep the rolls "as long as you like". Walker took him at his word for, according to M.H. Peacock, the rolls were still in Walker's possession in 1928.⁹ Between 1901 and 1928 Walker made transcripts of the rolls lent to him by Battie-Wrightson,¹⁰ and sometime before or after the publication of these transcripts in 1929 he presumably returned the originals to the Battie-Wrightson family. Certainly the rolls were no longer held by him in 1951, when Walker (at the age of ninety-two) wrote:

W.H. Battie Wrightson F.S.A. of Cusworth Hall, nr Doncaster, . . . lent . . . to me . . . the Proceedings of the Burgess Courts of Wakefield, 1533, 1554, 1556 and 1567 in 1901, which were printed by the Y.A.S. They are printed in my "Wakefield" Chap. VII. p.150 in the second edition. Mr Battie-Wrightson is dead and I have tried to find out who now has these Burgess Court Proceedings, but nothing is now known of them, so whether they were sold on his death with other things, or have been lost, I do not know.

It is, however, no good writing there, as I have done, and letters have been returned.¹¹

The rolls were recently rediscovered among some papers belonging to the Battie-Wrightson family which were stored in premises in the village of Cusworth. They had been brought there either when the contents of Cusworth Hall were disposed of (at a nine-day sale in 1951) or possibly when the Hall itself was sold in 1961 to Doncaster Rural District Council. When rediscovered the records were found in rolled form in a box. Their present owner¹² purchased them from the trustees of the Old Cusworth Hall Estate.

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

Description of the rolls

The four records are each written in a distinctive hand and in English. The earlier three are paper rolls, each sheet measuring some 17 inches long by 12 1/4 inches wide; the last roll, consisting of three skins of parchment, measures some 67 inches long by 12 1/2 inches wide.

The 1533 roll is written on one side of a single sheet, the 1556 roll (Plates 1a, b, c) on one side of each of three sheets lettered A, B and C respectively in the top left-hand corner, and the 1559 roll (Plates 2a, b) on both sides of a single sheet. The 1579 parchment roll is written on one side only.

All the rolls are headed "Wakefield" (variously spelt)¹³ with the exception of the 1559 record, and this is localised in Wakefield by names (e.g. "gyles dolleffe") which it has in common with the 1556 record. On the verso of the 1559 sheet (Plate 2b) is written "ffor | the | burges court" (bottom left-hand corner) and "Burges | Court | ffor pay | nes lade" (bottom right-hand corner).

When the rolls came into the present owner's possession they were wrapped in three sheets of used parchment, and this doubtless led to Battie-Wrightson's initial belief that there were three rolls rather than four. The cover for the 1533 and 1559 rolls is a leaf from a medieval religious manuscript with coloured capitals and some ornamentation; it has an endorsement difficult to decipher which seems to end with the word "Court". The sheet used to enclose the 1556 roll contains accounts relating to the Isle of Axholme in 1459 and is endorsed "Burgs Court in the third and ffourthe yeare of King Phillip and Quene Marie" (1556-7). The cover for the 1579 roll, which is probably another sheet of the Axholme accounts, is endorsed "Baliff 21 Eliz" (1578-9).

A new transcript of the play references

The following transcript observes the practice of *REED (Records of Early English Drama)*, expanding abbreviated words in the original and enclosing missing or illegible letters. It also transcribes flourished final "n" as "n" and uses vertical strokes to indicate ends of lines in the original.

1556

[Plate 1b (penultimate item)]

Item a payne is sett that everye crafte and occupacion doo

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

bring furthe | their pagauntes of Corpus Christi daye. as
hathe bene heretofore vsed. and to | gyve furthe the speches of
the same. in Easter holydayes in payne of | everye one not so
doynge to forfeit | xl s

1559

[Plate 2b (sixth item)]

Item a payn ys layd yat gyles dolleffe shall brenge In or
Cavsse to be broght ye regenall of Corpvvs Christy play befo(re)
yis & wytsonday In pane (...) |

[Plate 2b (last item)]

Item a payn ys layde yat ye mest(er)es of ye Co'r'pvs Christi
playe shall Come & mayke thayre a Covntes before ye
gentyllmen & burgessvs of ye to(wn) | before thys & may day
next In payn of euere on not so doynge – xx s |

Correction of Walker's published transcript

- (1) Walker's 1554 record should be dated 1559. The numeral "9" can still be seen in the original heading: "... In anno 1559".¹⁴
- (2) Walker has, without notice, changed the 1556 item and the second 1559 item from their original positions. Apparently his motive in doing so was to group together items relating to the Corpus Christi play.¹⁵
- (3) In the 1556 record, for "pagaunts" read "pagauntes", and for "after holydayes" read "Easter holydayes".
- (4) In the two items of the 1559 record there are several minor errors: (*first item*) for "Corpus Xty" read "Corpvvs Christy", for "before" read "befo(re)"; (*second item*) for "mesters" read "mest(er)es", for "Corpus Xti" read "Co'r'pvs Christi", for "a Count" read "a Covntes", for "toun" read "to(wn)", and for "everye oñ" read "euere on". In these instances Walker's handwritten copy is more accurate.¹⁶

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

Downe land by the Inheritance of the Counte of Wakefield
 nept after the death of the Counte of Wakefield in the
 time and counte of the Counte of Wakefield and of the Counte of
 and Ladys Anne of Cleve and quene in the year 1550

Item a xaine is set that every man that oweth any money for any service good
 or thinge they have boughte at any tyme, or for any service boughte and in the
 Church, or for any other thinge paymēt to the Church, that they come in
 and paye the same to the hands of the Churchwardens betwixt the said and maye
 have next comynge, in paymēt of the same one not so doynge } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that the ~~Churchwardens~~ or his Deputye doo within the tyme of
 the Clocke bell a quarter of any house where money is paymēt of the same
 tyme not so doynge. } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that the Clerk and the bellman do the clock and some
 from the Churchwardens out any house or butchinge of the same through the
 default, and if it be so founde that they do make it of the same owne tyme } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that the warden of the town doo every moxynge
 of the said and findeth as other sayd in paymēt of the same tyme } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that every man do make do make the payments
 ancynt the same, or the same and before the feast of the said Michael
 Garthgill next comynge in paymēt of the same one not so doynge } 10^{lb}

Item a xaine is set that the baylyve do the same the same the same
 the same or they do the same out any house in the same, in paymēt of the same tyme
 not of the baylyve not so doynge } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that every man do plow the same the same the same at his ground
 the same the same out, in paymēt of the same one not so doynge } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that no man nor woman do goe in to the street to buy
 any wylful or any kynde of other stuff comynge to the next in xaine
 of the same tyme so doynge } 10^{lb}

Item a xaine is set that every man may not in the town and the same
 any house in the town or any other where abiths the town doo
 what they have founde before the same next in xaine of the same out so
 taken away after the same day } 10^{lb}

note
 Item a xaine is set that every man may not have any tithes of the same the same
 any tithes betwixt the said and the said next, and if they have no tithes from the same
 in paymēt of the same tyme so doynge } 10^{lb}

Plate 1a Wakefield Burgess Court Roll 1556 (sheet A)
 (This photograph and those following are reproduced by courtesy of
 John Goodchild.)

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

This a payment is for that the Bishop do give us for the same as the town of Wakefield in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that no maner of persons have any way at any end of the town or in any corner but that the cause of the same to be done in some convenient place for convenience of the town in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the Mayor may not woman founde the same with any other maner of persons nor any other kind of things in the same in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the Rupper from the church shall not be taken nor any other way of the same in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the churchwarden from the church shall not be taken nor any other way of the same in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the churchwarden of the church do make a water pipe at the end of the church in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the churchwarden in Northgate do make a water pipe at the end of the church in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

All it is further concluded and agreed by the Burgeses of this shire that the Mayor shall have the one half of all the profits that shall come of the town and of all other burgesse courts first after and the other half to the use of the town and that one of the same shall go with the Mayor from time to time hereafter for to receive the same. That is to say for Northgate, Southgate, for Northgate, for Southgate, for Northgate, Richard, Northgate

This a payment is for that the churchwarden shall not be taken nor any other way of the same in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the churchwarden do take no dowry of mens goods in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the churchwarden and curacion do have the same as the town of Wakefield in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

This a payment is for that the churchwarden do make a water pipe at the end of the church in payment of the same as the town of Wakefield

Plate 1b Wakefield Burgess Court Roll 1556 (sheet B)

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

Item it is awarded by the court that the fence of the oak woods be made as has bene
 with afore some persons as they ought to make be made this and I believe have made
 damage and this to be done and it is to be one of the fence I believe it is to be done
 but will have more work that the fence woods may be fenced for the benefit of
 the conscience of his town and this and the fence may to be made as of the fence and so
 to give for the fence may I believe I believe and William Hall for waste gate
 William Crofter John Lane and John Grant and for Northgate William Grant John
 Exchange and William Burgardson.

Item we the said court have founde that Nicholas Hoppin and Deco Payne clerk of
 the court shall have a sufficient due wage for cart wage and other charges at all times
 in the year as hath bene used upon the court of the town and the court shall have
 late and shall be to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient
 amount some wages to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient
 stoppinge the said wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Item a payment is due to the court of the town for the cart wage and other charges
 at the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages
 to the court of the town and the court shall have a sufficient amount some wages

Plate 1c Wakefield Burgess Court Roll 1556 (sheet C)

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

[The page contains several lines of handwritten text, which is extremely faint and largely illegible due to the quality of the scan. The text appears to be organized into a list or series of entries, with some lines starting with capital letters or numbers. The handwriting is cursive and typical of the late 16th or early 17th century.]

Plate 2a Wakefield Burgess Court Roll 1559 (recto)

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

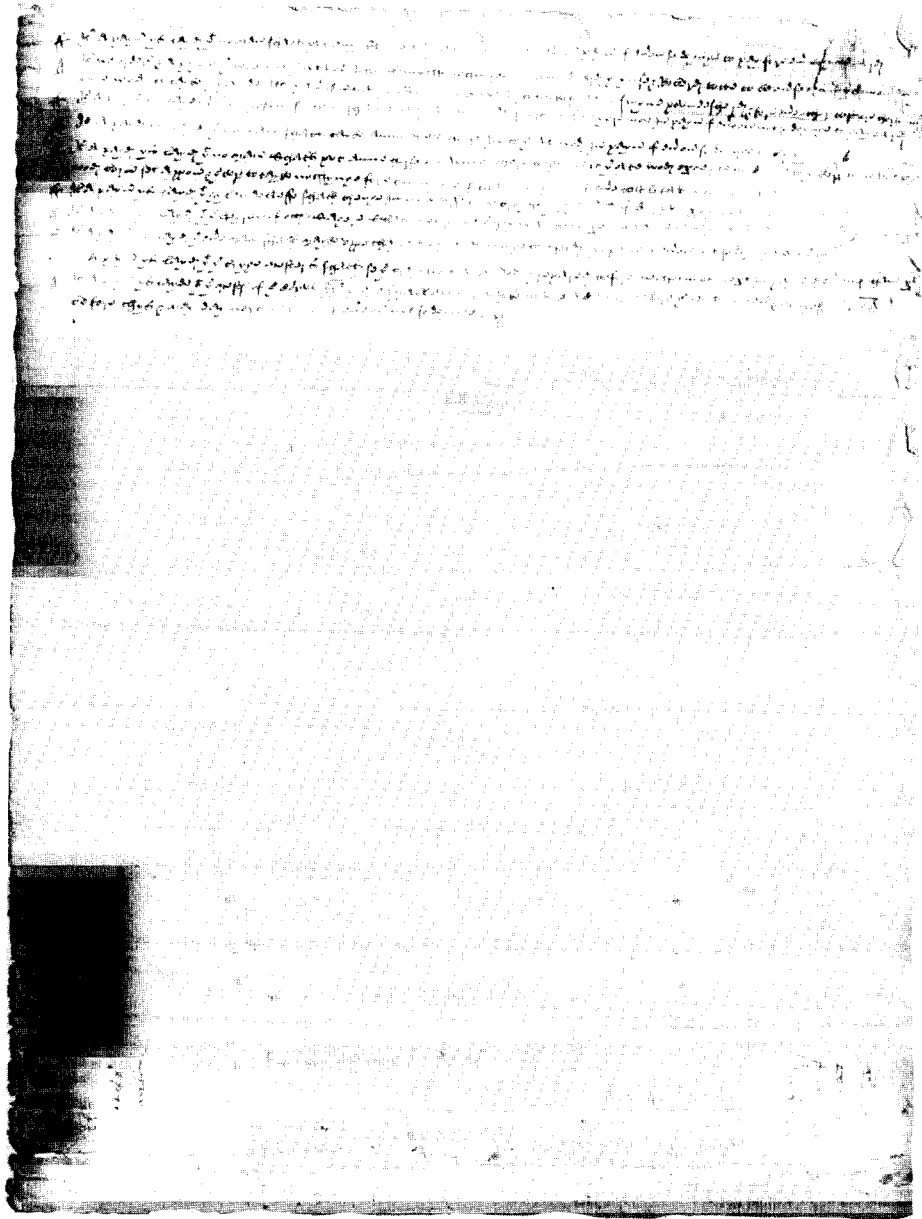


Plate 2b Wakefield Burgess Court Roll 1559 (verso)

The additional items in Walker's transcript of the 1556 roll

In the published 1556 roll a number of play items are added to the one original item transcribed above. These are reproduced by Walker from his handwritten copy of the record; they are not present in the original, nor in Battie-Wrightson's copy. In Walker's handwritten copy the additional items are written on a separate sheet numbered "4a" under the heading "Michaelmas 1556", with an indication in the left margin of p.4 ("4a to come in here") that they are to be inserted after the original item referring to the "pagauntes of Corpus Christi daye".¹⁷ In his published transcript Walker has transferred both the original item and the additional items to a new position following an entry concerned with "waytes". He did this perhaps in the belief that the town waits of Wakefield were associated with the dramatic celebrations on Corpus Christi day.

The additional items, as given in Walker's published transcript, are as follows:

Itm a payne is sett that everye player be redy in his pagaunt at settled tyme before 5 of ye clocke in ye mornyng in payne of every one not so doynge to forfett vjs. viijd.

Itm a payne is sett yt ye players playe where settled and no where els in payne of no so doynge to forfett xxs.

Itm a payne is sett yt no man goe armed to disturb ye playe or hinder ye procession in payne of everye one so doynge vjs. viijd.

Itm a payne is sett yt everye man shall leave hys weapons att hys home or att hys ynne in payne not so doynge vjs. viijd.

Ye summe of ye expens of ye Cherche mester for ye Corpus Christi playe xvijs. xd.

Item payd to ye preste xijd.

Itm payd to ye mynstrells xxd.

Itm payd to ye mynstrells of Corpus Christi playe iijs. ivd.

Itm payd for ye Corpus Christi playe & ye wrytynge of ye spechys for yt iijs. viijd.

Itm payd for ye Baner for ye mynstrells vjs. viijd.

Itm payd for ye ryngyng ye same day vjd.

Itm payd for garlonds on Corpus Christi day xijd.¹⁸

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

Date of insertion of the additional items

It is not known exactly when Walker copied the 1556 record lent to him by Battie-Wrightson in December 1901. But it is noticeable that the additional items are written on a separate sheet which is different from the sheets used for transcribing the original record. The ruled lines on this sheet are closer together and the handwriting, although distinctively Walker's, is smaller, with finer strokes, than in the transcription of the 1556 record. We can therefore infer that the items in question were written at a different time from the 1556 transcript and added later.

More precisely, it can be shown that these items were added sometime between 1924 and 1928. The three original play references were first mentioned by Walker, but not transcribed in full, in a lecture delivered in 1924.¹⁹ The original references, fully transcribed, were published twice by Peacock in 1925 (once in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*) and again in 1926.²⁰ There is no mention at all of the additional items until 1928, when Peacock wrote a second letter to *TLS* reporting that "some new references . . . have just come to light in the Wakefield Burgess Rolls for 1556" which he is able to publish "by the kindness of Mr J.W. Walker, F.S.A. . . . in whose possession the fragments of the rolls are at present".²¹ The additional items then follow.

Source of the additional items

The immediate source of the added items in the published 1556 transcript is the insertion in Walker's handwritten copy of this record. Their ultimate source is a matter for speculation.

One possibility is that he took them from another sixteenth-century Wakefield document in his possession, now lost. It seems unlikely, however, that this document, if it ever existed, was one of the Burgess Court documents lent to him. Battie-Wrightson thought at first he had only three records, which he dated 1534 (an error for 1533), 1556 and 1578 (an error for 1579),²² but he afterwards fancied that the second sheet of the 1533 roll was "20 years later than the 1st sheet".²³ To begin with, Walker assigned the second sheet to 1533 and gave this date to two of the original play references.²⁴ He subsequently accepted Battie-Wrightson's suggestion that the second sheet was twenty years later and, in his handwritten copy of this record, assigned it to "1554", underlining the "4" and putting a question mark opposite.²⁵ Battie-Wrightson made no mention of any other sheets, and Walker has

nowhere stated that he had more than four records lent to him.

This still leaves the problem of how Walker twice managed to date the fourth record "1557" (on the title-page of his handwritten copy of the "originals on paper")²⁶ and "1567" (in his letter of April 7, 1951),²⁷ as if he had some document other than the 1579 record in mind. However, 1557 and 1567 are probably memorial errors for 1579, despite the fact that the fourth record is on parchment²⁸ and is clearly dated 6 November 21 Elizabeth (i.e. 1579). Walker not infrequently gets his dates wrong. For example, in the order quoted in the second edition of *Wakefield: Its History and People*, 2 vols. (Wakefield, 1939) I, p.140, beginning "It was ordered in 1579 . . .", 1579 is an error for 1554 (i.e. 1559). On p.150 of the same volume, "a payn is layd yt Thomas Ackenson. . ." is wrongly dated 1584 instead of 1554 (i.e. 1559).

A second possibility is that the additional items in the 1556 record were fabricated, not in the sense that Walker made them up but rather that he culled them from the published records of other towns and modified them slightly to suit their Wakefield context. Walker, who had some familiarity with other records in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antiquarian publications, thought it necessary to point out the similarity between two items in the accounts of St Mary at Hill, London, and one of the items added to the 1556 record. Thus in the second edition of *Wakefield: Its History and People*, I, p.155, he writes: "Garlands seem to have played an important part in the exhibition of these plays; at Wakefield the accounts, as presented by the Pageant Master show that there was paid in 1556 'for garlonds on Corpus Christi Day xijd.' " He then gives two similar payments for garlands from the churchwardens' accounts of St Mary at Hill in 1477 and 1479.²⁹ Walker rounds off his paragraph with another item from the St Mary at Hill accounts which has nothing to do with garlands but is an unambiguous play reference: "In 1485:-- 'For the hire of garments for pageants, is viijd.' "³⁰ Walker's apparent confusion of items relating to the procession on Corpus Christi day (such as the money spent on garlands) with a payment for pageant garments is characteristic also of the medley of expenses listed in the addition to the 1556 record.

Not only the garlands on Corpus Christi day but all the other items added by Walker can be closely paralleled in the civic or church records of other towns. First, the four "paynes" regulating the conduct of players and spectators (see above, p.94) are strongly reminiscent of some details of the York Proclamation issued by the city authorities in 1415:

Proclamacio ludi corporis christi facienda in vigilia corporis

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

christi.

We comand of þe kynges be halue . . . þat no man go armed in þis Citee . . . in distourbaunce of . . . þe play or hyndering of þe processiou of Corpore christi and þat þai leue þare hernas [armour and weapons] in þare Ines . . . and þat men þat brynges furth pacentes þat þai play at the places þat is assigned þerfore and nowere elles . . . And that euery player that shall play be redy in his pagiaunt at conveyant tyme that is to say at the mydhowre betwix iiijth and vth of the cloke in the mornyg . . . sub pena . . . vj s viij d.³¹

If these extracts from the York Proclamation are compared with Walker's four "paynes", it will be seen that the references to the players in the Proclamation are grouped together as the first two items (recalling Walker's rearrangement of the play items in the 1556 and 1559 records). The source of these four items is likely to have been the transcript of the Proclamation published by Drake or Sharp.³² But the addition of them may have been suggested to Walker by the paraphrase of the Proclamation in his own copy of the Rev. George Oliver's *History of the Holy Trinity Guild, at Sleaford, with an Account of its Miracle Plays, Religious Mysteries, and Shows* (Lincoln, 1837).³³ This could have been what happened since Oliver's paraphrase is printed on a page facing that on which three other Sleaford items used by Walker appear (see below, n.36).

Secondly, all the items of expenditure of the Wakefield "Cherche mester [Churchwarden] for ye Corpus Christi playe", with the exception of the last item (the payment for "garlonds"), are apparently taken from Oliver's excerpts from the account book of the Holy Trinity Guild at Sleaford, which is not now extant. In order to substantiate this statement, the following items from Oliver should be compared with Walker's items (see above, p.94).

1477	It payd to ye prest for messe penys for ye bredyr dyssesyd yt zer	xd.
	It payd to ye mynstrels	xiiijd.
	It payd to ye mynstrells of corpus day	iiijd. ³⁴
1480	It payd for the hymnall [<i>an error for</i>	

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

	regenall] of ye play for ye Ascencon & the wrytyng of spechys & payntyng of a garnet for god	iijs. viijd. ³⁵
[1477]	It. for beryng of ye Baner to ye mynstrells	vjd. ³⁶
1477	It. payd for the ryngyng of ye same day	ijd. ³⁷

The last of the Wakefield expenses is similar, as Walker himself notes (see above, p.96), to an item in the St Mary at Hill churchwardens' accounts:

1477	Item, for Garlondis one Corpus Christi day	x d ³⁸
------	--	-------------------

When allowance has been made for common linguistic usage, coincidence, and the possibility of other towns influencing Wakefield in the sixteenth century, it is still easier to believe that the additional items in the 1556 record were derived by Walker from antiquarian publications of late medieval records. While it is just credible that a York proclamation of 1415 might have influenced the wording of a Wakefield Burgess Court record in 1556, it is hard to believe that this record was also influenced by church documents from Sleaford (Lincs.) and London dated 1477.

The incongruous mixture of play and processional items in the Wakefield churchwarden's list of expenses is matched by the oddness of combining general rules for future performances with the itemised expenses of a past performance. Possibly the addition of the first four items was justified in Walker's mind by the authentic 1556 play item, which also refers to a future performance of the "payauntes of Corpus Christi daye". Again, the addition of the itemised expenses of "ye Churche mester for ye Corpus Christi playe" may have been prompted by the authentic 1559 item that "ye mest(er)es of ye Co'r'pvs Christi playe shall Come & mayke thayre a Covntes before ye gentyllmen & burgessvs of ye to(wn)".

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Walker himself between 1924 and 1928 cobbled together the items added to the 1556 record and that he did so with the help of records published by nineteenth-century antiquarians. Why else, having had the Burgess Court records in his possession since 1901, did he not reveal these particular items to Peacock until 1928 – some four years after he had made known the authentic play references in the 1556 and 1559 records? If the additional items were transcribed from a sixteenth-century Wakefield document, they are full of

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

problems which are difficult to explain;³⁹ if they were not, the problems are of Walker's making and do not require an explanation.

When Walker, fired by Peacock's enthusiasm, came to realise that the three authentic references in the Burgess Court records had a special importance in establishing the existence of a Corpus Christi play at Wakefield in the sixteenth century, he may have wished to reinforce this scanty evidence with picturesque details borrowed from the records of other towns.

Certainly, Walker's readiness to reinforce the evidence of historical documents is apparent elsewhere. For example, the York Chamberlains' Book of Accounts contains an item, dated 1446, concerning a Wakefield player paid for his services at York.⁴⁰ Walker magnified one player into "players" in the first edition of *Wakefield: Its History and People* (Wakefield, 1934) p.137: "The Wakefield players were well known, and their services were in request in other places, for they played at York in 1446." M.G. Frampton, after seeing the galleys of the first edition, pointed out that he had misrepresented the York item.⁴¹ This explains why Walker modified his earlier statement in the second edition (I, p.155): "The Wakefield players were well known and their services were in request at other places; an actor, and one would like to think it was the Wakefield Master, was paid 12d. for playing at York in the year 1446. Item; ludenti de Wakefeld, xijd." Walker's later statement is still inaccurate but at least he now correctly informs us that only one Wakefield player was paid for his services at York.

To cast doubts on the authenticity of the items added to the Burgess Court record for 1556 may be unfair to an outstanding historian of Wakefield. Nevertheless there are serious doubts about the added items which suggest that they should not be considered as part of the historical evidence for the performance of a Corpus Christi play at Wakefield. It must, however, be emphasized that even when Walker's additional items are discounted, there are still three authentic play references (one in the 1556 roll and two in the 1559 roll). These, together with the Diocesan Court of High Commission document of 1576,⁴² which virtually prohibits the play at Wakefield, firmly establish that Wakefield had a Corpus Christi play in the sixteenth century.

NOTES

- 1 J.W. Walker, "The Burgess Court, Wakefield 1533, 1554, 1556, and 1579", in *Miscellanea II*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Ser. 74 (1929) pp.16-32. For information about the Wakefield historian J.W. Walker, OBE, FSA (1859-1953), see the new preface by H. Milnes Walker to the 3rd ed. (1966) of Walker's *Wakefield: Its History and People*.
- 2 For a description of these items, first added by Walker to his handwritten transcript of the 1556 roll and later appearing in his published transcript, see Jean Forrester and A.C. Cawley, "The Corpus Christi Play of Wakefield: A New Look at the Burgess Court Records", *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 7 (1974) pp.108-16 (with appendices).
- 3 William Henry Battie-Wrightson, FSA of Cusworth Hall near Doncaster, who married the eldest daughter of the third Marquess of Exeter, died in April 1903 at the age of 48. He left a widow, a son and a daughter, the last of whom is still (1986) alive.
- 4 His transcript is kept in Leeds City Archives, Sheepscar (BW/M/Box 19).
- 5 Battie-Wrightson's mistaken idea, at first, that he had only three Burgess Court rolls is commented on below, p.87. For his wrong dating of the 1533 and 1579 rolls see below, p.95.
- 6 Letter to Leatham, November 25, 1901 (Yorkshire Archaeological Society MS 817).
- 7 Battie-Wrightson probably had in mind his ancestor John Batty (d.1623), a merchant of Wakefield and Alverthorpe who was a foundation governor and benefactor of Wakefield Grammar School and a man busily engaged in local affairs. Batty's own name does not appear in the extant Burgess Court rolls, although his great-uncle Bernard Batty ("barnard batte") of Wakefield, who died in 1535, is recorded as absent from court in the 1533 roll. It is difficult to understand why Batty – or indeed his descendants – should have acquired these rolls and preserved them too. But John Batty was certainly in a position to acquire them, for he was active in Wakefield at the time of the demise of the Burgess Court in about 1580. Also, it may be significant that his granddaughter married a descendant of the "gyles dolleffe" (d.1569) who was ordered by the Burgess Court in 1559 to bring in the "regenall" of the Corpus Christi play.
- 8 Letter to Walker, December 26, 1901 (YAS MS 817).
- 9 See quotation from Peacock's letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (1928), below, p.95.

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

Matthew Henry Peacock, Head Master of Wakefield Grammar School from 1883 to 1910, was actively interested in the "Wakefield Mysteries".

10 Now MS 813 in the YAS Library.

11 Letter to A.C. Cawley, April 7, 1951.

12 John Goodchild, M.Univ., the first Curator of Cusworth Hall Museum 1966-75 and at present Principal Local Studies Officer and Archivist at Wakefield Library Headquarters, who has made it possible for us to transcribe and publish the play items in the rolls for 1556 and 1559 as well as to reproduce photographs of these rolls.

13 It should be noted that Walker ("The Burges Court", p.16) has added the heading "The Burges Court, Wakefield." to his transcript of the 1533 roll.

14 Forrester, using external evidence, corrected the date of this record to 1559/60 before the original rolls were rediscovered; see Forrester and Cawley, "The Corpus Christi Play of Wakefield", p.111.

15 *Ibid.*, pp.110, 112.

16 *Ibid.*, p.112.

17 *Ibid.*, p.110. For a photocopy of pp. 4 and 4a see Forrester and Cawley, "The Corpus Christi Play of Wakefield", Appendix III.

18 "The Burges Court", pp.21-2.

19 J.W. Walker, "Wakefield Town Life in the 15th and 16th Centuries", Inaugural lecture at the foundation of The Wakefield Historical Society on December 19 (Wakefield, 1924, repr. from *The Wakefield Express*).

20 M.H. Peacock, "The Wakefield Mysteries", letter to *TLS* (March 5, 1925) p.156; "A Note on the Identity of the Towneley Plays with the Wakefield Mysteries", *Anglia Beiblatt* 36 (1925) pp.111-14; "The Wakefield Mysteries", *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 28 (1926) pp.427-30.

21 M.H. Peacock, "The Wakefield Mysteries", letter to *TLS* (June 7, 1928) p.431.

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

- 22 Letter to Leatham, November 25, 1901.
- 23 Letter to Walker, December 26, 1901.
- 24 In his 1924 lecture these two references (now known to belong to 1559) are dated 1533. This error was repeated in 1925 and 1926 by Peacock, and much later by E.K. Chambers in *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947) p.35.
- 25 See Walker's handwritten copy (YAS MS 813), reproduced by Jean Forrester, *Wakefield Mystery Plays and the Burgess Court Records: A New Discovery* (Ossett, 1974) Y5. The question mark does not appear in Walker's published transcript ("The Burges Court", p.18).
- 26 For a photocopy see Forrester, *Wakefield Mystery Plays*, Y1.
- 27 Letter to Cawley, April 7, 1951.
- 28 See Forrester, *Wakefield Mystery Plays*, Y20. Perhaps the title-page of Walker's handwritten copy of the records refers only to the three originals on paper and not to the 1579 original on parchment. In this case "1557" cannot be a memorial error for "1579" and some other explanation must be sought. It is possible, for example, that Walker wrote "1556 1557" in mistake for "1556/1557"; if so, he made the same mistake twice on the title-page.
- 29 Walker does not refer to the source of these two items, but they are probably from *The Medieval Records of a London City Church (St Mary at Hill) A.D. 1420-1559*, ed. H. Littlehales, EETS, OS 125 (London, 1904) pp.81, 100. Both items seem to relate to the procession on Corpus Christi day and not to the performance of a play.
- 30 This item, for which Walker again does not give his source, is taken from [John Nichols], *Illustrations of the Manners and Expences of Antient Times in England, in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1797) p.100, where Nichols quotes the following from the St Mary at Hill churchwardens' accounts: "1485 Received for hire of the garments for pageants i s 8 d". This item is not in Littlehales, who states (p.127) that the 1485-7 records of St Mary at Hill are lost; see Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Toronto, 1984) p.183, entry 948.
- 31 *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1979) I, pp.24-5.

The Corpus Christi Play in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls

- 32 Francis Drake, *Eboracum: or the History and Antiquities of the City of York* (London, 1736), Appendix, p.xxxiii; Thomas Sharp, *A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently performed at Coventry* (Coventry, 1825; repr. 1973) p.140.
- 33 The copy of this book in the YAS Library (Press-mark 78 D2) has the inscription "4/3/41 PRESENTED BY MR J.W. WALKER".
- 34 Oliver, *History of the Holy Trinity Guild, at Sleaford*, p.53, where the order of these 1477 items is the same as Walker's.
- 35 Oliver, p.82. The sum paid is the same as in Walker, but the original Sleaford record may have had "iijs^s iiij^d"; see Stanley J. Kahrl, *Collections Volume VIII: Records of Plays and Players in Lincolnshire 1300-1585*, The Malone Society (London, 1969 [1974]) p.86).
- 36 Oliver, p.68. This item follows two others also concerned with "mynstrells" which Oliver has already given on p.53 (see above, n.34). The items on p.68 face the page on which Oliver gives a paraphrase of the York Proclamation.
- 37 Oliver, p.53.
- 38 Littlehales, *The Medieval Records of a London City Church*, p.81.
- 39 See comments on Walker's additional items in *The Revels History of Drama in English I, Medieval Drama*, ed. Lois Potter (London and New York, 1983) pp.51-8.
- 40 "j ludenti de Wakefeld vj d"; see Johnston and Rogerson, *Records of Early English Drama: York I*, p.67.
- 41 Letter to Walker, January 23, 1934. The letters of Professor Frampton (Pomona College, Claremont, Calif.) to Walker from 1933 to 1940 are kept in the YAS archives (MS 805). It may be noted here that Frampton more than once took Walker to task for not always making a distinction between "the actual Wakefield scene" and "the general mediaeval scene"; see letters to Walker, November 12, 1934 and February 11, 1938.
- 42 See *The Revels History of Drama in English I*, p.37.

Cawley, Forrester, Goodchild

We wish to thank the Council of The Yorkshire Archaeological Society for permission to quote from the copy of George Oliver's *History of the Holy Trinity Guild, at Sleaford* presented by J.W. Walker to the Society's Library and from letters written by Walker and others which are kept in its archives at Claremont, Clarendon Road, Leeds. We also wish to thank the Archivist (Mrs S. Thomas) and Librarian (Miss S. Leadbeater) for their courteous assistance.